



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT**

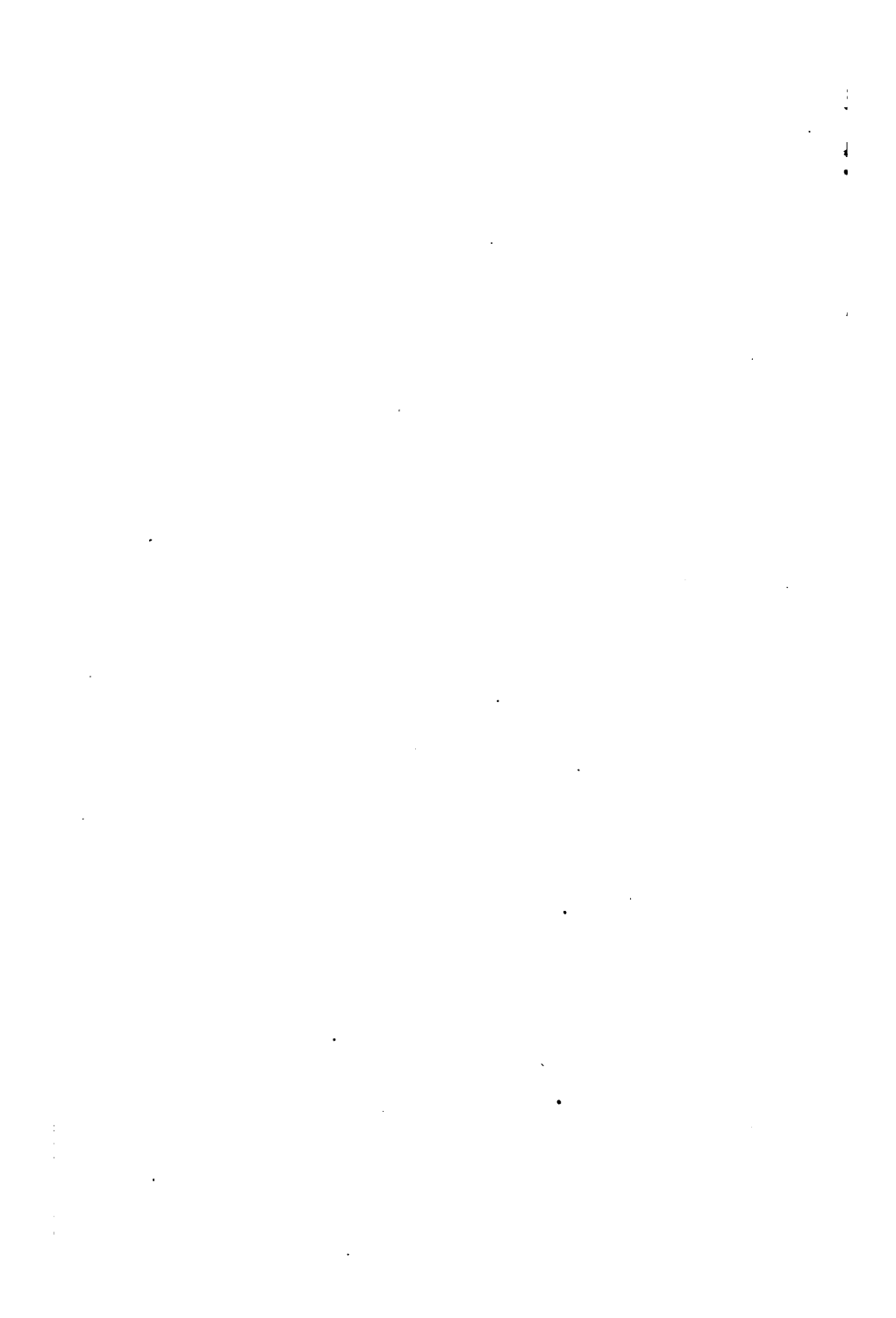
**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

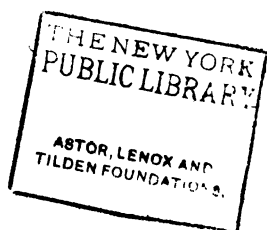
MAY 23 1915

SEP 21 1915

NOV 6 1915









A DAIRY MAID *Page 41*

**PEEPS AT
MANY LANDS**

ICELAND

**LIST OF VOLUMES IN THE
PEEPS AT MANY LANDS
SERIES**

**EACH CONTAINING 12 FULL-PAGE
ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR**

BURMA	ITALY
EGYPT	JAPAN
ENGLAND	MOROCCO
FRANCE	SCOTLAND
HOLLAND	SIAM
HOLY LAND	SOUTH AFRICA
ICELAND	SOUTH SEAS
INDIA	SWITZERLAND

**A LARGER VOLUME
IN THE SAME STYLE**

THE WORLD

**Containing 37 full-page illustrations in
colour**

**PUBLISHED BY
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
SOHO SQUARE, LONDON, W.**

AGENTS

AMERICA . . . THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
64 & 66 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

AUSTRALASIA. OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, MELBOURNE

CANADA . . . THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA, LTD.
27 RICHMOND STREET WEST, TORONTO

INDIA MACMILLAN & COMPANY, LTD.
MACMILLAN BUILDING, BOMBAY
209 BOW BAZAAR STREET, CALCUTTA



PEEPS AT MANY LANDS

ICELAND

BY

MRS. DISNEY LEITH

WITH TWELVE WATER-COLOUR
ILLUSTRATIONS

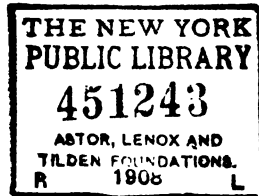
BY

M. A. WEMYSS
AND THE AUTHOR

LONDON

ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

1908



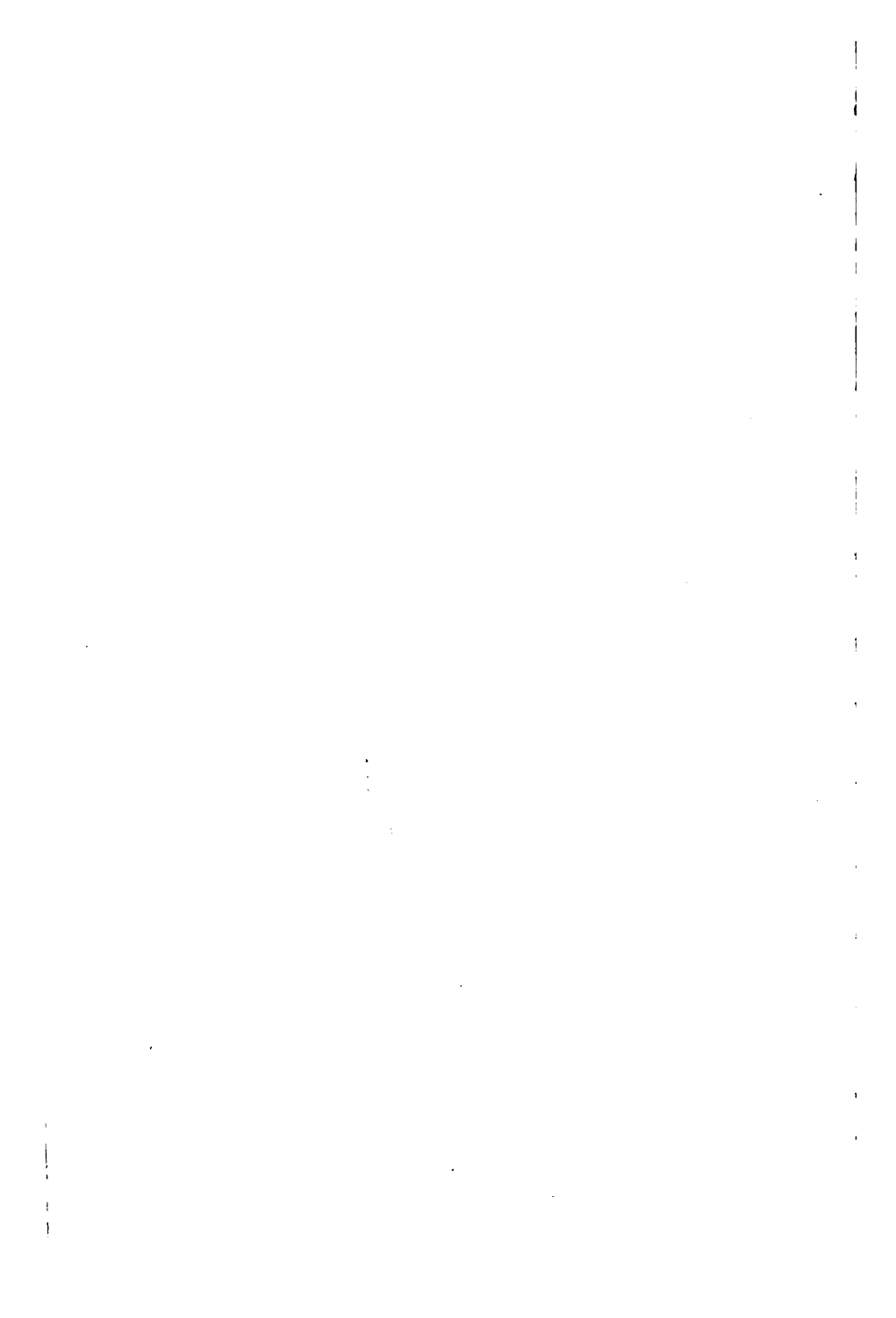
TO
MY GRANDDAUGHTER
MILDRED KATHERINE

NOV 1908
LIBRARY
YASSEL

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ICELAND: ITS DISCOVERY AND EARLY HISTORY - - -	I
II. THE SAGAS—THE SKALDS - -	6
III. ICELAND TO-DAY—REYKJAVIK - -	12
IV. TRAVELLING—ICELANDIC CHILDREN -	18
V. GEYSIR AND HOT SPRINGS - -	24 ✓
VI. THE WATERFALLS—THINGVELLIR -	31
VII. MANNERS AND CUSTOMS - -	36 ✓
VIII. MANNERS AND CUSTOMS (<i>continued</i>)—ART IN ICELAND - - -	42
IX. NAMES—LANGUAGE - - -	48
X. INDUSTRIES AND EXPORTS—BIRDS -	53
XI. SURTUR'S CAVE - - -	59
XII. GOVERNMENT—HOSPITAL—EIDER-DUCKS -	66
—CONCLUSION - - -	66

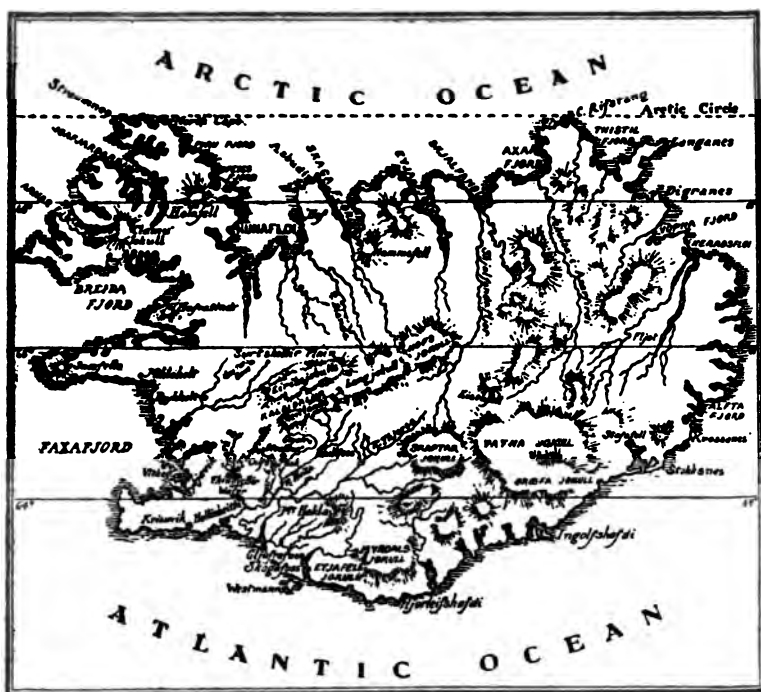
5. emmen Oct 20/08



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

A DAIRY MAID -	-	-	<i>M. A. W. Frontispiece</i>	
			FACING PAGE	
HIGH STREET, REYKJAVIK	-	<i>M. C. I. L.</i>	-	9
AN ICELANDIC HORSEWOMAN	-	<i>M. C. I. L. and</i>		
		<i>M. A. W.</i>	-	16
A FARM	-	-	<i>M. C. I. L.</i>	20
GREAT GEYSIR IN ERUPTION	-	<i>M. C. I. L.</i>	-	25
SKOGAFOSS	-	-	<i>M. C. I. L. and</i>	
		<i>M. A. W.</i>	-	32
A HAY CARRIER	-	-	<i>M. A. W.</i>	38
THE EWE PEN	-	-	<i>M. A. W.</i>	41
A FAIR ICELANDER IN ORDINARY		<i>M. A. W.</i>	-	44
DRESS				
A GIRL IN HOLIDAY DRESS	-	<i>M. A. W.</i>	-	48
AN ICELAND PONY	-	-	<i>M. A. W.</i>	57
GULLFOSS	-	-	<i>M. C. I. L. and</i>	
		<i>M. A. W.</i>	-	64

Sketch-Map of Iceland on page viii



SKETCH-MAP OF ICELAND.

ICELAND

CHAPTER I

ICELAND : DISCOVERY AND EARLY HISTORY

How large is Iceland? People often ask this question, and sometimes they think Iceland is quite a small island, something like the Isle of Wight! whereas it is one-fifth larger than Ireland, and you take quite two days, after sighting land, to steam along the south and south-west coasts to the landing-place at Reykjavik, the capital.

Iceland lies far out in the north. Your geography books will tell you its latitude is 63-66 N., and longitude 13-24 W. ; the North Sea or Arctic Ocean bounds it on the north-east and west sides, and joins the

Iceland

Atlantic, which washes its southern shores. And there is nearly always a roughish bit of sea to get through where these two mighty oceans meet.

The island was first discovered by a sea-roving chieftain named Nadodd in the ninth century. He had been sailing in the North Sea and among the Faroe Isles, and he came on his voyage within sight of this great unknown land. It looked very cold, and the snow was down to the water's edge. He does not seem to have done much more than land there, however, but gave it the name of Snœland, which means Snowland, and went back south again. The first real settlers were called Ingolf and Hjørleif. They were Norwegian chiefs who had quarrelled with their king, Harald, who was very tyrannical; and so they left Norway and sailed in search of a new home in A.D. 874. They were heathens in those days, and always carried about the pillars of their houses, which were sacred to their gods. They drew near at length to Iceland, and when approaching the shore, they cast their sacred pillars into the sea; and where

Discovery and Early History

the tide washed the pillars to shore, there they landed and began to establish themselves. As you steam along the coast now you see two great headlands, called Ingolfshöfði and Hjørleifshöfði, which are supposed to be where those chiefs landed. Höfði means a "headland" in Icelandic.

These two settlers were followed by many more, but it must have taken long years before the colonists were fully established. Gradually, however, they spread and multiplied in the new country. There is an old history in Iceland called the "Landnama Bók," which means "the book of the takers of land," and gives their names and the districts where they settled. But we do not hear of any earlier inhabitants; so the Icelanders now are of Norwegian origin, descended from some of the greatest families in Norway. Many of these seafaring chiefs were called vikings, and are spoken of by us as "sea-kings." "Viking," however, does not mean any sort of king, but is derived from the word "vik," which means a creek, because these seamen, who were more like what we now call pirates,

Iceland

used to put into the creeks or bays, and thence land and make raids into the near country and carry off prisoners and booty to their ships.

Of course in those days they were all heathen, and worshipped a number of gods—Odin and Thor, and Freya, and Loki, and Baldur—whose names you meet with in old English histories, as they were common to the Anglo-Saxon and Norwegian and Danish peoples, and also to some of the German countries. But first of all an Icelfander who had travelled abroad was converted to Christianity in the south, and he brought home with him a Saxon bishop, to convert his fellow-countrymen. The Icelfander was named Thorvald, "the Far-travelled." A good many of the natives were converted, but Christianity was not fully established till A.D. 1001, when it became the law of the land, and the first bishop was elected and sent abroad to be consecrated. His name was Isleif.

A long line of bishops followed, some of them very good and holy men. The greatest is generally held to be Thorlak,

Discovery and Early History

who was called Saint Thorlak after his death. His name has some interest for us, as when he was young he was sent to study at Lincoln, in our own country.

It would take too long to tell you of all the different changes that passed over the country as time went on. There was never a king of Iceland : the chiefs ruled their own country, but were more or less subject to the kings of Norway. They had a Parliament, and their greatest man there was called "the Law-speaker." The bishops, too, obtained great power, and were almost like little kings ; but there was often much civil dissension and quarrelling. Later the country passed, with Norway, under the Danish rule, and though Norway became separate again, Iceland has never done so, but is still reckoned a part of the Danish kingdom. With Danish rule Lutheranism became, and is still, the established religion of the country.

CHAPTER II

THE SAGAS—THE SKALDS

I THINK everyone who knows anything of Iceland has heard at least of the sagas. The word "saga" means story—a story of any kind, history or fiction; but when we speak of the sagas, we always mean those wonderful old tales which have been handed down for generations, first by word of mouth as the countryfolk used to sit round the fire on the long winter evenings and listen to the story-teller, then in later times they were committed to writing, and so have been preserved to the present day. They are generally the lives and adventures of particular persons or families, but the same characters are named in different sagas, and the dates are often carefully given, agreeing with other dates in

The Sagas—The Skalds

European history ; so that, although they are very curious, and often contain a good deal that may be considered merely legendary, no one can read them without feeling sure that the main features of the stories are the real history of Iceland.

One of the greatest of these stories is the *Njála*, which has been beautifully translated for us by Sir George Dasent. It tells the history of a great and wise and good chieftain called *Njal*, which is much the same name as the Irish or Scotch "Neil." He was a very peaceful, mild man, but he lived in a fierce and unquiet time, and he had a number of sons who gave him a great deal of sorrow and trouble, and eventually brought about his death and their own in a shocking manner. In those days there was a custom that, if a man were murdered—if he were of any importance—his relatives and friends took up what was called the blood-feud, and did not rest till he was avenged by the slaying of his foes. This custom lasted even after the people had become Christians. It happened that a wicked murder had been committed

Iceland

through Njal's sons' jealousy, and the family of the murdered man took up the blood-feud. It was carried on for a long time, but at last the foes of Njal's family hunted down their victims till they took refuge in their own house. Having surrounded it, the avengers determined to set fire to it ; but first they offered Njal, who was then an old man, leave to go out and save himself. This, however, he refused to do, as he considered it shameful to live on after his sons were slain. Then they bade his wife come out, as they did not wish that she should be burnt indoors ; but she refused to leave her husband. They had a young grandson with them, and him they would have saved ; but he clung to the old people, and would not go out. So the three laid themselves down on their bed, and were suffocated in the fumes of the burning house. The three sons of Njal were all stifled or crushed by the falling beams, and the only soul that escaped was Kari, Njal's son-in-law. He jumped out through the burning rafters, and fled away. I have been to the

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.



HIGH STREET, REYKJAVIK *Page 14*

The Sagas—The Skalds

place where these things happened, and I was shown a little hollow in the grass which was said to have been once a pool, where Kari put out the fire in his clothes.

Kari, of course, took up the task of avenging his father-in-law's death, and went through many adventures. At last, many years after, Flosi, the chief of Njal's murderers, was shipwrecked and cast ashore just below Kari's house. He and his men went and sought shelter there, though it might have been supposed that Kari would have little mercy to show to his long-sought enemy. But Kari said he could not take vengeance on a shipwrecked man, and he gave Flosi welcome and shelter after all; thus these bitter and implacable foes were reconciled at last.

I think if good old Njal could have known this, it would have made him very happy that the sad quarrel was ended so; for he had been one of the first to become a Christian, and he met his fate with Christian courage and meekness.

It would take too long to tell you even the names of all the wonderful sagas.

Iceland

There is the story of Grettir, the strong man—an Icelandic Samson; and Gisli the outlaw; and Heims-Kringla, the world's history; and a saga about our own Orkney Isles, which are very much mixed with old Icelandic history; and the bishops' sagas, the history of the first conversion of Iceland, and the good and holy men who were her first bishops and clergy.

Besides the saga writers, Iceland possessed a number of poets called "skalds." In older days nearly every warrior was a skald, and used to extemporize songs on occasions. Sometimes they were to excite men to battle, sometimes in praise of noble deeds or beautiful ladies; sometimes insulting songs were made upon enemies. In the Middle Ages, too, Iceland had poets; one, named Hallgrim Petursson, who lived at the same time with John Milton, wrote some very beautiful sacred poetry, which is much prized by the people still. And nowadays the art of poetry is very largely spread among Icelanders, and a great deal is written

Iceland

There is the story of Grettir, the strong man—an Icelandic Samson ; and Gisli the outlaw ; and Heims-Kringla, the world's history ; and a saga about our own Orkney Isles, which are very much mixed up with old Icelandic history ; and the Bishops' sagas, the history of the first conversion of Iceland, and the good and holy men who were her first bishops and clergy.

Besides the saga writers, Iceland possessed a number of poets called "skalds." In older days nearly every warrior was a skald, and used to extemporize songs on all occasions. Sometimes they were to incite men to battle, sometimes in praise of noble deeds or beautiful ladies ; sometimes insulting songs were made upon enemies. In the Middle Ages, too, Iceland had poets ; one, named Hallgrim Petursson, who lived at the same time with John Milton, wrote some very beautiful sacred poetry, which is much prized by the people still. And nowadays the gift of poetry is very largely spread among the Icelanders, and a great deal is written

The Sagas—The Skalds

and published in the island. One of the most famed of living skalds is Matthias Jochumsson, who is very well known by his countrymen as a writer of verse. There are Steingrim Jonsson, Einar Benediktsson, Thorvald Erlingsson, and many more names ; and Valdemar Briem, the pastor-poet, who has written a very large collection of sacred poems, psalms, hymns, and memorial verses, some of them of a very beautiful character indeed.

CHAPTER III

ICELAND TO-DAY—REYKJAVIK

THE Iceland of to-day is not very unlike that of the saga times. The island is so far removed from other countries, so cut off by its isolated position, that modern inventions and improvements come to it very slowly, and many have not yet reached it. The absence of them, though it may seem strange to us, yet helps to keep the wonderful simplicity, hospitality, and hardness of the country and its folk, which make the great charm of Iceland to most strangers who visit it.

When you first see Iceland from the steamer that takes you there, it is usually a little bit of a high mountain, the Vatna Jökull, that appears to you as if in the clouds. The word "jökull" means a glacier

Iceland To-day—Reykjavik

or ice-field, where the snow never melts. Many of the jökulls are volcanoes as well. Is it not curious to think of fiery pits underneath all that cold, unmelting snow and ice? Yet many of the volcanoes have erupted in the past, and desolated all the country around for miles and miles. Very few of them are still active.

As you steam along, the beautiful island gradually opens out, and you see more and more ice-fields: the Myrdals, a great smooth white mountain; the Eyjafell, which runs far out to sea; and presently you see Hekla, usually with some snow on it; which last is the best-known and latest active volcano here, and is often the only name that English people know in Iceland. Before landing we come to some pretty rocky islands called the Westmanns. Only one is inhabited. If the boat stops, as it usually does, for mails, you have a chance to land on the island, or to visit in a small boat a wonderful cave in the rocks, quite high and deep. The islands swarm with puffins, which fly out screaming if they are disturbed.

Iceland

When you come into Reykjavik Bay—which is called Faxafjord—the steamer anchors a good way from shore, and you have to get with your luggage into a small row-boat, and are landed at a little wooden pier, of which there are many in the harbour.

And then—no cabs, no buses, no hurrying to catch a train, but your luggage is put on a hand-barrow, and you walk off to your hotel, just a stone's-throw from the wharf.

When I first knew Reykjavik it was a tiny little fishing-town, with funny old houses and stores, and shops like a very small Scotch village "merchant's"; now it is spreading in all directions. But nearly all the houses are built of wood and iron, with just a stone foundation, and very funnily they build them, up and down and across and alongside—by no means in straight rows, except here and there. They are all of different heights, too, and some of them seem standing on tiptoe to look over their neighbours' heads.

The streets are very quiet for a town,

Iceland To-day—Reykjavik

but there are more carts and little pony carriages every year. But the chief sound is the trot, trot, trot of the dear little ponies! The prettiest feature of the town is the number of ponies; round every corner, in every backyard, wherever there is a scrap of green grass, and often where there is not, ponies are to be seen. Most of them are very pretty, and every colour is to be met with. Every man, woman, and child, old or young, rides in Iceland; in most places it is the only way of getting about, and the usual way even where there are wheel roads.

The Icelanders are very kind to their ponies, though they work them hard; and the ponies are generally willing and very patient, and they stand quite quiet wherever their masters leave them. The men pull the reins over their heads, and let them hang down in the dusty road, and then the ponies know they are to stand still and wait, and they do so for hours.

The principal buildings in Reykjavik are the Cathedral, which looks more like an old-fashioned, very plain parish church than what

Iceland

we call a cathedral ; the Parliament House, which is a large square stone building ; the National Bank, which also contains the Museum at present ; the " Latin School," and another large new schoolhouse, where the King of Denmark was entertained on a recent visit. Behind the town is a small lake, which looks very pretty with the reflections of the buildings near it and the beautiful purple hills behind. I have seen lovely sunsets at Reykjavik. In summer the days are very long ; in June there is really no night : the sun sets for about ten minutes at midnight, and then rises again. In the north of the island, where it touches the Arctic Circle, the sun does not set at all for a day or two. Of course in winter the days are proportionately short, and there are only three hours of daylight ; but the nights are very beautiful, with moon and starlight, and the aurora borealis, or northern light. I have seen the latter even in August, when the nights are beginning to darken ; it is very beautiful, like a white flame reaching quite across the sky.



AN ICELANDIC HORSEWOMAN *Page 18*

NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

Iceland To-day—Reykjavik

Iceland is a very quiet, law-abiding country, and though there is a prison in Reykjavik, there are hardly ever any prisoners. There used to be only two policemen in Reykjavik. They walked about the town in dark uniforms, looking rather like tin soldiers. Now there are a few more, as the town has increased so much ; but there is very little crime. Iceland has no army or navy, but is under the protection of Denmark.

CHAPTER IV

TRAVELLING—ICELANDIC CHILDREN

THERE are no railways in Iceland. The people are beginning to make more roads now, and to some of the principal towns you can drive in a little carriage ; but for all ordinary journeys and travelling excursions you must ride the ponies. And this is what makes Icelandic travelling so unlike any other sort of travelling, and gives it much of its charm.

You would think it great fun starting on a journey, when the ponies are all collected and the boxes packed. You have to put all you want in a little wooden pack—the Icelanders call it a “koffort”—and one of these is hooked on either side of the pony’s pack-saddle. The boxes must be fairly equal in weight, or the load

Travelling

keeps shifting. When the pack-pony is loaded with his two boxes, and perhaps a bundle of wraps in the middle, he looks a very funny figure. The pony is very patient while his load is being strapped and corded on ; then he waddles off at a funny little amble, and keeps it up nearly all day, except where the road is very rough. He climbs over rocks and mounds like a cat ; walks up steep hills and down, where riders have to dismount, and fords rivers, and it is very seldom that he makes a slip or meets with an accident.

Everyone who rides a long journey should have a remount to rest the ponies, and the packs should also be changed ; so that means two ponies to every rider and load. The spare ponies run loose, under the charge of a man or boy, and look very pretty running along the moorland paths. After riding two or three hours there is halt for refreshment, sometimes at a farm, sometimes in the open, but always where the ponies can get grass and a drink from a stream. It is delightful picnicking on the road in the fine weather, but not so

Iceland

pleasant in pouring rain, if you are far from a dwelling-house. You are glad to sit on your pack-boxes when they are taken down, and must make the best of it, while the rain-drops pour into your meat-tin or cup. Yet it is seldom that anyone takes cold or any harm from a little "roughing it" in Iceland.

After a long ride, some eight or ten hours, and various halts, you are very glad to draw up at the farm where you are to sleep. No matter whether you have met the inhabitants before or not, no matter what time you arrive, the kind, good people turn out and bid you welcome to the best they have. There is generally a nice little "guest-room," like the parlour in a small farm-house at home, and a spare bedroom, but they will make up beds in the parlour if required. You have nice clean sheets and warm down quilts, for the eider-ducks are very abundant here. They give you very good food, too—nice fresh fish if you are near a lake or river, tender mutton or lamb, eggs, milk, cream and butter, and especially good coffee. Once



A FARM Page 20

NEW YORK
LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

Icelandic Children

I was put up at a parsonage when the pastor and his wife were away, and the children were our hosts. There were two big boys and three girls, and no children could have been kinder or had prettier manners than these little Icelanders, far up in the country. The boys had been fishing, and caught a beautiful salmon, and they insisted on having it for supper. The eldest girl helped their servant to lay our table, and the boys were always waiting to fetch what we wanted, though they never crowded about us or stood staring at the strangers. No, they behaved like perfect little gentlemen and ladies, and made us feel as if on a visit to real friends.

I have made the acquaintance of many dear little children in Iceland. My first friends were the children of a pastor at Thingvellir, thirty miles from Reykjavik, and as it is the first stage to many places, I have stayed with them very often—since Inga, the eldest daughter, was a little baby. Now she is a tall, clever, useful girl, with two brothers and two sisters, and is her mother's right hand. Hermann, the eldest

Iceland

boy, is a bit of a pickle, but very quick and handy ; since he was quite small he could do anything with the ponies, and loves to take a troop of them to pasture, or round them up when wanted. Icelandic children are very well taught, though there are no schools out in the country. Their parents teach them a good deal ; also there are travelling teachers who go from farm to farm. When they grow older they are sent to school in Reykjavik, and if the boys are destined for a profession they are sent to college at Copenhagen.

The children seem to have a happy time. Summer is a long holiday, and they are out all day, with the cows or the sheep or the ponies, or making hay, or gathering wild berries. They have not many playthings ; one of their toys is the shank-bone of a sheep, called "leggi," to which they tie a bit of rope and pretend it is a pony. They have games, however, something like ours, and I spent a merry evening once, when it rained outside, playing "general post" and "forfeits" with the Thingvellir children, in which

Icelandic Children

their father and mother and another dear old friend—a kind big man who loves children—joined ; and a very jolly time we had, though the “forfeits” were all “cried” in Icelandic, and the post “fared” from some of the recent stages of our journey.

CHAPTER V

THE GEYSIR AND HOT SPRINGS

I THINK everyone who has heard of Iceland at all, has connected it with the name of the Geysir. The word *geysir* means "gusher," and is applied to the hot springs which erupt or throw up jets of water like a fountain, as distinct from the *hver*, or hot springs which merely bubble and steam. These are called *laugar*, which means washing-places, as they are often so used.

One of the most remarkable of these places lies about a mile and a half out of Reykjavik, and here all the town's washing is done. There is a stream—just such as is called in Scotland a burn—which flows across the wide open space beyond the town; quite an ordinary stream to look

The Geysir and Hot Springs

at, but at a particular point it jets first warm, and then quite scalding hot water, always steaming up, and here is the ready-made laundry! Some large iron houses or sheds have been built beside it, in which the ironing and "getting up" is done, but all the boiling and cleansing is in the *natural* boiler, some of which is covered by iron grating, as a poor woman once lost her life by falling in. It is quite a lively scene, when you arrive there, to see thirty or forty women, with different-coloured kerchiefs on their heads and their petticoats turned up, washing and beating and wringing, and chattering all the time, as merry as possible. There is always the unfailing coffee-pot for refreshment, for the laundry is thirsty work, and the poor bodies seem to go on all day long. They take the clothes to and from the laundry in little hand-carts, which the women draw or push. The washing is very well done, and the quality of the water and the pure air seem to make the clothes very white and fresh.

But to return to the Geysir. Iceland,

Iceland

being a volcanic country, is full of hot springs, which are always steaming up on mountain-sides or in the plains, looking from far away like the smoke of a distant train ; but what people usually mean when they ask, "Have you seen the Geysir?" is the famous large boiling fountain in the south, about eighty or ninety miles from the capital.

The journey thither is a very pretty one ; you cross plains, green with sweet-smelling birch scrub, having beautiful distant views of Hekla and other glacier mountains ; then you turn the shoulder of a vast dark chain of hills, called the Calf's Peaks, on your left, and descend into a lovely green valley, where are sometimes pretty ponies—mares and foals—grazing in flocks. You cross rivers, too, in this journey, and one in particular, called the Bruar-á, or Bridge River. Shall I tell you why? It is a pretty wide, rapid river, but very shallow, and in the middle of it is a great chasm, into which the water falls, roaring, from the level of the ford. People rode in across the rocks, and over

The Geysir and Hot Springs

the chasm was a little wooden bridge with a hand-rail ; the ponies always made for the bridge, and so steady and surefooted are they that I never heard of an accident happening, though the slightest slip or swerve at the chasm would be certain death. I have crossed in this way many times, and felt quite sorry to have to use the new grand bridge which has been thrown across lower down the stream. It seemed to take away all the excitement and pleasure you felt in accomplishing the more perilous crossing.

As you draw near the Geysir district the character of the road changes : the ground becomes dry and flaky, and presently you are aware of little pools and streams under the ponies' feet. Many of the pools are warm. The Geysir itself—the largest—stands in a very bare piece of ground and on a slight rise. The basin is quite round, and looks exactly like a large artificial fountain, but with a very deep crater or cup. Sometimes this is quite empty, and you could stand within the rim ; then, again, the water

Iceland

bubbles up, and it gets quite full. But if you are lucky enough to see an eruption, there is first a rumbling noise, and then—stand back! for the boiling water shoots up in a straight jet, sometimes thirty feet or more. You must be very careful not to stand on the side where the wind would blow the falling column upon you. It is all over very soon, and nothing but steam left in the basin. Besides the great Geysir, there are various others all around; one well known, called Strokkur, or the Churn, went to sleep some years ago, after some earthquakes which took place, but has now begun to grow active again. The Little Geysir often plays; I have seen it looking like a shower of diamonds; and there are several funny pools always bubbling up mud and making noises like a sty full of pigs. There are two hot pools: one called Blesi, which means a white-faced horse ("blazie"), and it is said that one was drowned in it once; and another, which broke out after the afore-said earthquakes, has been loyally named "The King's Pool."

The Geysir and Hot Springs

Besides the Geysir in the south, there are some pools nearer the coast, which smoke, but do not play like the fountains, and are called Reykir. Several are of beautiful colours—blue and salmon-pink, and each one different. In the north-west route are also hot springs, and at a place called Reykholt is a very curious circular bath which was made hundreds of years ago by a famous man called Snorri. There is a channel by which the water from the hot spring can be turned into the bath or shut out, and it is quite in good order. All the hot water for the church farm is brought from these springs.

Another very wonderful thing I must tell you of before we leave the hot springs. In a river called Reykjadal-á, which means "steaming-dale's water," there is a little mound with a boiling spring in the very middle of the cold water which flows all round it. I have ridden close up to it; the pony was not afraid, though I should think that any of our English ponies would shy at such a very unnatural sight.

Akin to the hot springs are the sulphur

Iceland

springs at Krisuvik, near the south coast. You have to cross a very wild barren rocky region to get near them. When you have nearly reached them you smell a strong smell of sulphur, but it is rather like a savoury cooking smell, as of a giant's dinner in preparation. The sulphur stream looks very yellow and dirty, and steams up, with a strong smell, under the cliffs by which it runs. Some years ago an Englishman tried to work the sulphur-mines, but they did not pay, and the work is now given up.

CHAPTER VI

THE WATERFALLS—THINGVELLIR

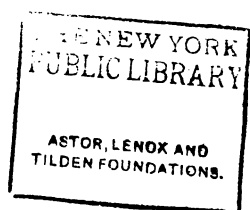
THERE are very many waterfalls in Iceland, more than I can tell you of in this little book. Along the south coast are the Skogafoss, which is about 100 feet high, and the Gljufrafoss, which is shut in by rocks, and you can ride in behind it, quite under the fall. Then there is the Gullfoss, or Gold-force ("force" or "foss" is still the Cumberland and Westmorland name for a waterfall), which is in a river called the Hvítá, or White Water, not far from the Geysir. A smaller fall in the north-west is called Barnafoss—the Children's (Bairns') Force—because it is said that two little boys were once drowned there, having ventured on to a narrow bridge, attracted by the rainbow

Iceland

colours which are seen in the spray of a waterfall. Gothafoss and Dettifoss in the north, and Trollafoss (which means the "Trolls'," or Fairies' Force), not far from Reykjavik, are also fine waterfalls. But Gullfoss is about the grandest of all, quite the show fall, and I have heard that a traveller who had seen both considered it almost finer than Niagara!

The children of whom I told you at Thingvellir Parsonage live a little way from the great Öxará Waterfall. I think when they go to other places they will find them very silent at first, unless they live near the sea or some great river, for always, day and night, they hear the roar of this great cataract, sometimes louder, sometimes less, according to the wind and the volume of water, which is, of course, greater after the melting of the snows or a rainy season. The Öxará, which means "Axe-water," is a large swift-flowing river, which just above Thingvellir takes a sudden leap off the high lava cliff into a pool half-way down the cliff, and then a second fall to the lower level of the plain.





The Waterfalls—Thingvellir

The cliffs and pathways are called *Almannagjá*—a long and difficult name to say, is it not? The last part of it, *gjá*, is pronounced as if spelt “gyow” in English; the name means “All Men’s Rift,” because in olden days everyone came through it to the meeting of the Althing, or Parliament, which was held on some broad flat rocks near by, called the Hill of Laws.

Thingvellir (pronounced Thingvetlir) means the Fields of Meeting, on account of the assembling of the Parliament here. The chieftains and great men who came to it had booths or tents all round to live in while Parliament was sitting; and near the river is the form of a grassy enclosure, rather like a sheep-pen, which is called by tradition Njal’s Booth. It may well have been the spot occupied by the wise and good old Njal, who, as I told you earlier, was burnt in his homestead in revenge for his sons’ misdeeds.

The Öxará River runs into a very large and beautiful lake, the Thingvellir Water. It is quite eight English miles long, and spreads far up among the hills. It

Iceland

abounds with beautiful trout, very large and of a bright yellow colour, like our char. People who visit Thingvellir Parsonage are usually delighted with this fine fish, which is always served up to the guests.

Thingvellir Church is a tiny wooden building standing on a mound, with lovely views through its unstained windows. It is very plain inside, as most of the Icelandic churches are ; and the service seems rather dreary compared with our own, consisting of a long sermon, and some hymns, often pretty, but sung very slowly. The good people come long distances over the moors to attend church, and they tie their ponies together and leave them standing outside the building. The ladies slip off their long riding-skirts, which they wear over their Sunday dresses, and so they go into church. After service there is a great meeting of friends and neighbours, and chatting, and, no doubt, plenty of gossip, and those who have ridden far are treated to coffee and cake at the Parsonage. When ready, they all,

The Waterfalls—Thingvellir

men and women, collect and saddle their ponies; the ladies resume their habits, mount their funny big saddles, generally made with a rail to hold by, and away go the ponies at a brisk canter over the moor.

CHAPTER VII

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS

I THINK it may amuse you to hear something about the manners and customs of the Iceland people.

When I speak of "manners," I must begin by saying that these are generally very good, although not exactly the same as our own. Of course many of them seem a little rough to us ; but the people have what may be called natural good manners, and I think this arises from their nature being so kindly and simple. Any one of them would do his best to help a stranger, or show him hospitality, or make him understand anything he wanted to know. In country or town they seldom pass without a salutation—men raise their hats to each other as well as to ladies ;

Manners and Customs

the men also kiss each other when they are near relatives and friends, but this is not so universal as it used to be in the past. The greetings between parents and children are pretty. I have seen a boy, on meeting his mother after a short absence, carefully rein up his pony beside hers for a kiss. After meals it is the custom for each person present to shake hands with the host, saying, "Thak fyrir mat," which means "Thanks for meat"! This seems to take the place of saying grace nowadays, but in old books you find quite long hymns for grace called "board psalms." At table, the master of the house and the guests sit down, and the ladies of the family do all the waiting; occasionally they sit down and partake, but always have to rise and go to fetch the next course. Sometimes they have their meal quite apart. It seems strange at first, and almost uncomfortable for Englishmen to sit still and let the hostess do all the work; but it is the custom, even as in the old days when, as we read, Njal's wife set meat on the board; and it is like the Eastern custom mentioned

Iceland

in the Bible. The women work very hard ; I have seen one cutting grass with a scythe, but they more often just make the hay. Once, at a farm in the north, I saw a girl driving three ponies in front of her, laden with hay in soft green bundles tied on each side. As they quite hide the pony, the effect is most laughable, and you would think they were walking hayricks. This girl was riding astride a fourth pony without any saddle ; she sat very gracefully, and quite at her ease. I suppose she had brought the hay from some distance. When she reached a grassy spot near the farm she dismounted, shook all the hay bundles down one by one, then jumped on to her pony and drove the three hay-carriers back to the field.

The farmers do not sow corn, only turnips and potatoes ; and the only harvest is the natural hay. It is cut in July and August, and in fine weather it soon dries. Most of the farms have big wooden barns in which to keep their hay. Every farmer has a number of ponies, sometimes twenty or more ; they do all the work of



A HAY CARRIER

NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

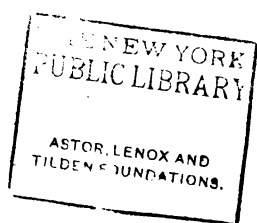
Manners and Customs

the farm. No Icelfander walks when he can ride! Wherever they have to go, even a short distance, they jump on their handy little pony and skim away to their destination. The little children begin to ride early; sometimes they are tied on! The women ride at all ages; quite old women must ride if they wish to go from place to place. The women's saddles look very funny to us; some are very smartly decorated with brass nails, and cushions in cross-stitch work. They have a broad foot-board, and a rail on the off-side, which the rider holds to steady herself. Some use saddles like our side-saddles of many years ago. But whatever they ride on, they are hardy and plucky riders, and some of the ground they go over would astonish even a hunting Englishwoman. A woman will ride on a long journey by herself, carrying her little bag on her saddle. The funniest loads are put on ponies' backs. I have met a worthy couple jogging along driving a third pony carrying a spinning wheel! Ponies carry planks and iron for building, tools, provisions, and I have even seen a live

Iceland

sheep having a ride! A piano is carried out to the country between two ponies; and sometimes milk or cream is carried in tins, in wooden panniers. A great deal of cream is now sent to large creameries in the country, to be made into butter for exportation. At every farm you come to you hear the noise of the cream-separator going, sometimes half the night.

I have not told you how we cross the rivers. Many of them, though wide, are shallow enough to ford on pony-back, though you may get feet and skirts a little wet, even if you tuck them up behind you as far as you can. The ponies tread very carefully, and when the current is strong they go sideways, like a regiment of cavalry, step by step. You have to sit tight and let them pick their own way, only keeping just behind or beside your guide, and giving the pack-ponies a wide berth, for they never consider the width of their load, either on land or in water, and would think nothing of crushing you with the boxes! When the river is too deep to ford, riders and their packs and saddles





THE EWE PEN

Manners and Customs

are ferried across, and the good little ponies swim. They are driven into the water with shouts and whip-cracking ; in they go, deeper and deeper, blowing like grampuses ; at last only their noses are visible, till they land on the opposite bank, and begin feeding till you come up with them. This they are glad to do, and fortunately there is always grass near a river.

Besides the ponies, the farmers keep a good many cows, and the cows feed sometimes far from the farms, and come home of themselves to be milked. There are also many sheep, and the ewes are driven into a square pen to be milked every evening. I have seen as many as eighty in a pen, and there is just room for a couple of girls to go in and milk them one by one. I always wonder how they manage not to miss any, but they do somehow.

Fowls are also kept, and usually one or two dogs. The Icelandic dogs are of the true northern type, the shape of the Eskimo, or something like large Pomeranians. They are small for sheep-dogs, and often very pretty.

CHAPTER VIII

MANNERS AND CUSTOMS (*continued*)—ART IN ICELAND

“**HAVE** the Icelanders any national dress?” I am often asked. Decidedly they have, though the ordinary costume is very plain. It consists of a black cloth gown, made rather full in the skirt, with a bit of white shirt showing in front, a coloured apron, a neck-ribbon, and, on Sunday, a pair of black kid gloves—nothing more showy or attractive, and yet it becomes them; and many of the women are extremely handsome. On their heads is always the little round hufá—pronounced “hoo-a”—a black woven cap with a long tassel, and a silver ornament through which the end with the tassel is passed. In cold weather a shawl or kerchief is worn over the head,

Manners and Customs

as by the Scotch. The hair, which is often very fine, is dressed in long plaits, looped up to the head.

The festival dress is more remarkable. A high helmet covered with white muslin, from which a long white bridal veil depends, and often a golden coronet in front, is placed on the head, and the rest of the dress may be of flowing muslin, silk, or velvet. For out of doors a long coloured plush cloak, trimmed with ermine, is often worn, and a gold, silver, or embroidered waist-belt, often costly and of ancient work, is a great feature of a lady's toilet.

I cannot say that the men have any costume at all corresponding, though I believe in earlier days there was some more distinctive fashion for them than there is now.

The children we find dressed much like their fellows here, though there is the tendency to put anything young into "Écossais"—fancy tartan of wonderful shades—that you see in other parts of Europe. The girls do not wear the hufā

Iceland

until they are fourteen or older. About fifteen, the young people are confirmed ; but besides the religious preparation, they are required to pass a certain standard in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Confirmation is administered by the priest in the Lutheran Church, not by the Bishop, as with us. The baptismal service seems very like our own. In old times the babies wore a sort of mitre-shaped embroidered cap with the christening robe, but I never saw it at any christening at which I was present.

Needlework is a great feature of Icelandic industry. Nearly all the women are good workers ; some embroider most beautifully, and they also knit a great deal. At every farm you find sheets prettily marked by hand, often embroidered. If you are asked out to tea—or, more correctly, chocolate and coffee—the spoons are always brought in a silver basket, reposing on a prettily-worked d'oyley. Chocolate of a very fine quality, sweet and creamy, is handed round first, with a variety of cakes ; after that comes the



A FAIR IOELANDER IN ORDINARY DRESS *Page 42*

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

Manners and Customs

coffee. I have never seen tea-tables more daintily laid than in Iceland.

Some of the arrangements in the farms are curious to our ideas. My travelling companion and I once shared a bedroom at the top of an old farm-house : we were entertained by the cackling of hens and crowing of cocks most of the time, and in the morning discovered that they were roosting on the loft landing outside. When my friend went downstairs to breakfast, a lordly cock fluttered down after her with much clamour ! Another time we had to pass to our room through a large dormitory used by the children and some of the servants. A woman was putting some little ones to bed as we went by. Unfortunately the kitchen fire smoked dreadfully, and in the old Icelandic kitchen the fire is in the middle of the room, and the smoke goes out by the roof. Whether from this or no, the poor children coughed the whole night long, first one and then another, but there was not a cry or whine, though none of the women seemed to take any notice of the

Iceland

poor little people. We did not enjoy unbroken sleep, but our consolation was that the children's ailment was *not* whooping-cough !

The Icelanders as a people are very musical, though there are many difficulties in the way of transit for instruments. A harmonium is generally found in a parsonage, also in the churches. Some of the pastors are really good musicians, and play a great deal. The girls, too, are often first-rate pianists, and they not unfrequently play the guitar. As yet the violin has not been taken up as a female accomplishment, though there is a string band in the town.

But they can sing, both men and women ; the latter have often good voices, and almost the finest baritone I ever heard belongs to a young Icelandic doctor, who can sing songs in German, Swedish, Danish, English, and Norwegian, besides the lovely and often pathetic melodies of his own land.

Painting is not so universal, though there are two professionals and one amateur

Art

in Reykjavik whose pictures often attain to a high level of merit. Sculpture was formerly represented only by the world-famed Thorvaldsen, who was born at sea, of Icelandic parentage; but a successor has lately arisen in a young man from the country named Einar Jónsson. He has a studio in Copenhagen, and has produced some very fine statuary already. The best known is called "The Outlaw," and represents a poor, wild-looking man of olden times, carrying his dead wife strapped on his back and his little boy asleep on his arm. He is supposed to be taking his wife to bury her in consecrated ground, but as he is outlawed and would be put to death if he were seen, he must come at night and in secret. He carries a spade in his hand, and seems to be hurrying fast down a hill. His face is full of grief, and fear, and suspicion as he looks out; his faithful dog walks by his side, also watching for an enemy.

This statue stands at present in the entrance hall of the Reykjavik Museum.

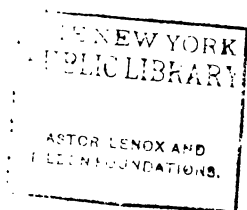
CHAPTER IX

NAMES—LANGUAGE

You will have noticed that an Icelander's surname always ends in "son." That is very like our English names, but in the case of the Icelander the name is what is called a patronymic—the name of his father—and may change with every generation. Thus, suppose a man is christened Jón (John), and he calls his son Páll (Paul); the son would be called Páll Jónsson. But if Páll grew up and had a son, he might very likely wish to name him after his father; thus the child would be Jón Pálsson. Sometimes the son bears his father's Christian name, and then he would be Jónsson. I know a man called Magnus Magnusson, and he told me his ancestors had been Magnus Magnussons for many



A GIRL IN HOLIDAY DRESS Page 43



Names—Language

many generations. You would think it would be very puzzling to trace their pedigrees, but they do not find it so. Many families can trace their line back quite to the saga times.

But what about the girls? They are called Pálsdóttir (Paul's daughter), Jónsdóttir, as the case may be. Whenever you ask the name of a man or woman, you are given the Christian name only ; if you want to know more, you must say "Hvers son?" (Whose son?) or "Hvers dóttir?" Sometimes when girls go abroad to live they add the "son" to their father's name, and use it for a surname, as "daughter" would seem strange. A married woman in Iceland is usually given her patronymic as well as her husband's name ; for instance, "Frú [Mrs.] Margrét Thordardóttir Sigurdsson," is the daughter of Thord and husband of Sigurdsson. There are only one or two old family surnames in Iceland, but they are quite the exception.

They have pretty little abbreviations to their names : a girl whose name is Sigrid will be called Sigga ; Gunna is used for

Iceland

Guthrun ; with men Toggi stands for Thorgrim, Siggi for Sigurd, Brynki for Brynjulf, and Manki (which sounds very like "Monkey") for Magnus.

They use all the old historic and heroic names still ; and it is funny to see on the shop-doors names which you have hitherto associated only with the chieftains and great men of the sagas now borne by your bootmaker and watchmaker.

Now I should like to tell you something rather curious about the Icelandic language. They use our alphabet, but have two extra letters—for the sounds of the *th* and *dh*. Perhaps you know that a Frenchman or German will have difficulty in pronouncing our "the," because he has no *th* sound in his language. The Icелander, on the other hand, pronounces *th* just as we do. Now, we had these two extra letters long ago, and they are found in old Anglo-Saxon writings ; but while we have kept the sound, we now use two letters instead of one, while the Icelanders keep both sound and letters. *Th* before a word is written with a letter rather like a *p*, called

Names—Language

thorn ; and *th*, as in “with,” is written with a cross-tailed *d*, called “pierced *d*.” In English writing now you have to use *th* in Icelandic names to represent the crossed *d*. There are a great many words in Icelandic exactly the same as ours ; for instance, lamb, egg, salt, land ; and many others nearly the same. This is all because—though I think few English people know anything about it—the Icelandic tongue is the original, or what is called the parent language of our own, besides that of the Danish, Norwegian, and some others. At first all the Northern nations spoke the same language, which was called Norse—and the Northmen were constantly over in Great Britain—the Icelanders and Norwegians as well as Danes. In our case and that of the Northern nations of Europe, the interchange, whether in peace or war, with those from the South caused a great blending and changing of language as years passed on. Iceland, on the other hand, being so far out in the sea, and so little visited by other nations, has kept the primitive old language almost exactly as it

Iceland

was spoken in the saga times. And that is why it is of such interest to those who study our own and kindred languages ; besides being rich in the grand old histories, which Icelanders can still read as easily as if they were written quite lately.

In the north-east of Scotland, where the Norsemen are known to have left most impression, a great many of the words used are distinctly Icelandic, as well as the idioms.

The voices and accent of the Icelandic people are soft and pretty, and they use many endearments of speech among themselves and to their children.

CHAPTER X

INDUSTRIES AND EXPORTS—BIRDS

THE chief industrial works of Iceland are carving, spinning, and weaving. The long winter evenings give time for these, and the men are very clever with their fingers. A strong, useful kind of cloth called "vadmál" is made in the native looms. There are both steam and water power looms, but in the country the old hand-loom weavers may still be seen at work.

The chief exports are ponies, fish, and butter, which last, as I told you, is made at the different district creameries, to which the farmers send their separated cream.

At every town or village by the sea the fishing industry is apparent. The chief catches are cod and halibut. These are taken in countless numbers, washed, dried,

Iceland

salted, stacked in heaps by the shore, and mostly exported to Spain, though a certain amount is consumed in the country. It is funny to see the fish-women at work. You can often watch them, some dozen or more, at a large tank close by the sea ; they have strong waterproof aprons, and long, thick woollen mits or gloves, and they wash and scrape and salt the great flat split fish day after day. All the shore is white with rows of the fish drying before it is stacked or sent away. The fishermen go out in spring, like our own ; the sea and weather are often very rough, and many poor fellows have been lost at sea.

The French and English send a number of trawlers to Icelandic waters, but they are not allowed to come beyond a certain limit, or they would destroy the poor Icelanders' means of living. A Danish gunboat is nearly always about the coasts to watch the fishing-ground, and England sends a man-of-war every year for a time in our own interests, to see fair play for our trawlers. Sometimes these have been driven on the bleak rocky shores and

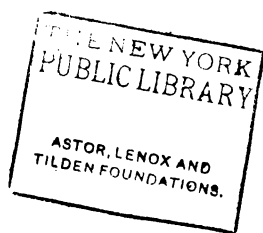
Industries and Exports—Birds

shipwrecked, and the sailors have wandered about until they chanced to meet with a kind Iceland farmer, who has taken them home and fed and sheltered them till they could get away. There have been several instances of this, and in all cases of distress the Icelanders are kind and humane and helpful, as far as their often small means will allow ; and they send the strangers long distances with men and ponies, even when the winter travelling is hard and dangerous, to enable them to get to the seashore and embark once more for home.

The poor little ponies! I have told you how important and useful they are in their own country, yet hundreds of them are shipped away every year to England or Scotland, and to Denmark. Some, we hope, get happy homes, as they are bought for ladies and children to ride and drive, for which their docility and patience render them most suitable. Many go straight to the mines, and so spend their lives far from the light of day. What a change from their free, wide pastures and bright

Iceland

skies and rushing rivers ! I have often seen a great troop of ponies, driven along the road like sheep, destined for shipment ; and I have travelled in a steamer with several hundred on board down in the hold. When the voyage is good I do not think they suffer much, but in rough weather many are injured and perish. When it is calm it is pretty to see them having their daily rations of hay and water ; the latter is passed along a hose when there are great numbers to satisfy. The Danish sailors are very kind to them ; they are fond of animals, and they love having a little dog or kitten to play with on board ship. The Iceland cats are a pretty bluey grey, with short thick fur. Visitors to the island sometimes buy kittens to take home. I have often seen various pets acquired after a trip in Iceland—Arctic foxes, the dark grey so much valued for furs ; a woolly Iceland puppy, like a little bear ; and a pair of young ravens. The latter could not have much enjoyed their voyage in a wooden packing-case, from which on occasions





AN ICELAND PONY Pages 14, 15, 18, 55

Industries and Exports—Birds

came dolorous croaks and protruding beaks. There are many ravens in the country—huge black birds, which stalk about the moors and look at you as you pass. I have also seen a fine eagle more than once, sitting on a rock. The wild swans are frequently seen when travelling, and look beautiful floating on a wide lonely lake, or flying across the sky, with their wild harsh “song,” which is praised by one of the Icelandic poets. There are many seals about the sea-coast, and I have seen one sunning itself on a rock below the path which our party were traversing. People often shoot the seals, and their skins, cured, can be bought in Reykjavik at the shops.

We do not hear our singing-birds in Iceland, but there are a great many moor and water birds which you meet with as you travel about—ptarmigan, golden plover, and a dear little bird which seems to be everywhere on the heaths and plains, the curlew, which the Icelanders call “spoi.” Go where you will, it is ten to one you see a curlew standing on any little pro-

Iceland

minent rock or mound, making its long curious "kirriwirriwirri" trill.

Near the sea, of course, are all kinds of gull, and tern, and puffin, and oystercatchers; and the great northern diver is a more rare, though not uncommon, inhabitant of the island.

CHAPTER XI

SURTUR'S CAVE

I AM now going to tell you a little about some wonderful caves in Iceland, in particular one called Surtshellir, or Surtur's Cave. Surtur is the name of a giant in Icelandic mythology ; he is supposed to be the fire giant, and is also called the world's destroyer. I think one can easily imagine the dwellers in such a volcanic land as Iceland believing that the eruptions of their mountains were caused by powerful unseen beings in the depths of the earth.

"Hellir" is the Icelandic word for a cave, and as double *l* is nearly always sounded as *dl* or *tl*, it is pronounced "hedlir." I have crossed a long, vast tract of country which is called the Hellisheithi, or "Heath of the Caves." The ground is all rocky—bleak

Iceland

grey gnarled rocks—and ever and anon is an underground opening like a low cave. In the Calf's Peaks Hill, of which I told you, is a large deep cave, which people often go to see as they pass, and I am sorry to say also often cut their names in the soft stone of the cave's mouth. That has always been considered a fault of the British tourist in particular, but I fear there are Icelandic names and initials to be seen here as well. Along the south coast, too, I have seen beautiful large caves used as stables and store-houses for hay—one with different levels of stone floors, exactly as if made by men.

But I must come to the big cave of Surtur, which is up in the north-west district of the country, or, rather, perhaps, the central west, but several days' journey north of Reykjavik. When I went to see it, I stayed at a farm called Kalmannstunga. We had a rather long ride before we arrived there; so we rested, and started, leaving our luggage and spare ponies behind, in the evening.

A wild but pretty ride beside a rushing

Surtur's Cave

river brought us at last to the plain where the great cave is. To find the right opening to enter requires some search by an expert guide, but ours soon found it—looking rather like the arched entrance to an underground railway. To get down to it you must scramble over immense rocks and boulders, and when you get to the bottom, you find the floor of the cave covered with snow and ice. Each person going in carries a lighted candle, as it soon becomes too dark to see your way. Inside, the cave is one huge long passage, and you could fancy it a gallery full of statues, but the figures are really frozen pillars of snow and ice, and enormous icicles of drip hang from the vaulted roof; these last are called stalactites, and the pillars on the ground are stalagmites. Going further in, there is a screen of bars of ice, upright and regular; if someone goes behind it with a light, it appears like a shrine in a cathedral. The passage goes on far, far underground; no one has ever explored the hundredth part of the caves in this wonderful district. It is said that

Iceland

in olden days outlaws and wild robbers lived in Surtshellir ; if so, they must have had a cold lodging, for the snow can never melt there. A modern Icelandic poet has written a play called "The Cavemen," in which some valiant champions are supposed to dwell in the cave of Surtur.

When I was in Switzerland I went to see another curious cave in an ice-field called the Morteratsch Glacier. The walls were solid ice, several feet thick, which had been cut out by men's hands, just to show the depth of the ice-crust. It was very wonderful, too, and it was lighted by electric light ; but it was to Surtshellir as a little lake to the mighty ocean.

When our party had seen enough of the caves, we walked and scrambled back to daylight—or, rather, twilight—and our ponies. There were four, and they had been left quite alone all the time we were in the cave ; but they had not moved, because they were standing side by side, yet head to tail, the bridle of one tied to the crupper of its companion, two and two.

Surtur's Cave

In this simple way you can leave ponies safely for hours ; they cannot stray, as one of the pair would always have to walk backward.

When we rode back to our farm the moon was shining brightly, and the snow hills around looked most beautiful in its calm light.

A curious sight I once saw on the south coast of Iceland was a house built against a rock, which had some natural caves in it. It stood quite away from the cliff in a flat plain ; the wooden walls and windows of the dwelling were laid against the rock, and one of the bedrooms, I believe, had to be reached by means of ropes.

Among the "jökulls," or ice-fields, are some very wild and barren plains and rocky regions. Many of these have not been explored at all, some of them only by very bold and intrepid travellers ; usually these have been Englishmen, for the people of Great Britain, as you know, are famous for their enterprise in exploring other lands than their own.

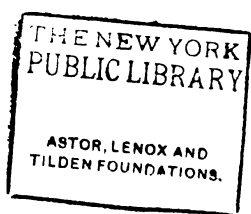
The longest and dreariest journey I

Iceland

have ever made was between some of the ice-fields near the Surtshellir Plain—the Ók, Geitlands, and Eiríksjökulls. The road we went was called Kaldidalur, which means "Cold Dale," and certainly it is a descriptive name. But though it was so wild, I have pleasant recollections of the journey, for we enjoyed it, though we were not sorry when it came to an end.

We left Kalmannstunga in the morning, and began by crossing a partly dry, stony river-bed, and here I remember seeing some pretty purple flowers, a sort of flag, growing among the loose stones. After climbing a hill, we got on the track—dry and stony, and raised, while on each side of us was a deep wide valley, and then the jökull. When the sun shone out, the snow on the ice-banks was a most lovely colour, blue where it was half melting, or white or grey, but always so cold. I remember we had a sharp hailstorm while we pressed on. The hailstones really cut our faces, but we were wearing regular seamen's sou'westers, and we buried our faces under the brims and let our good





Surtur's Cave

ponies find their own way. But the storm was soon over. For five hours we had to jog along, for there was no grass for the poor beasts, so we could not linger ; but we were all glad when at length some grass was visible, where we spread ourselves out to picnic and rest. Some travellers going northwards met us here ; one, a friend from Reykjavik, hailed me cheerily ; it was such a surprise, and we chatted for a time. But with this exception we did not see a soul till, late in the evening, we descended into a valley where was a haymaker—solitary at first, but we saw others further on. That night we were bound for Thingvellir. Never was I more pleased to recognize in the far distance the dark cliffs of the great Rift, with its one white break of the Óxará fall, telling us we were near our hospitable lodging and the end of our long lonely journey.

CHAPTER XII

GOVERNMENT—HOSPITAL—EIDER-DUCKS —CONCLUSION

THE government of Iceland is carried on by the Parliament, or Althing, which sits in Reykjavik, and has an Upper and a Lower House. The head of it is now called the Minister; he carries the measures passed by the Althing to Copenhagen, to be ratified by the Danish Government. He lives part of the year in Iceland and part in Denmark. Formerly there was a Governor of Iceland at the head of affairs. The country districts are each under a Sysselman, or sheriff, who transacts local business; the villages and parishes have a constable, or Hreppstjori, to attend to lesser matters and keep order.

There is one bishop in Reykjavik, and

The Hospital

several clergy connected with the cathedral ; but out in the country one priest or pastor often has to serve two churches very far apart, so that each church cannot have very many or frequent services.

I have not told you that there is a large hospital on the shores of the bay not far from Reykjavik. It is called the Leper Hospital. From early times there have been cases of leprosy in the island ; and of course it was very difficult to do anything to help the poor lepers when there was no suitable place to which to take them, to keep them away from other persons. So some kind people belonging to an Order called the Good Templars, in Denmark, joined together to build a large hospital, with everything that is necessary to make sick people comfortable and as happy as they can be, though the illness can never be cured. They have beautiful rooms, and a chaplain and a doctor, and kind skilled nurses to attend to them ; and it is hoped by this means that the terrible disease will be stamped out—which means that when the poor sick folk are kept away by themselves all their

Iceland

lives, there will be no more cases of leprosy. The conditions of living are improving too, and the inhabitants are beginning to learn more of what is called sanitation—that is, the laws by which people are kept clean and healthy, and free from infectious disorders.

Some years ago, when Iceland was poorer than it is now, and living was very hard, a great many of the inhabitants emigrated to America, and there is near Winnipeg a large colony founded by them. I believe all the emigrants do well, because Icelanders are hardy and industrious, and not used to easy lives at home. But now that times are better they regret that so many have left the old country, and are turning their attention rather to improving things at home.

There are two large green islands in the bay of Reykjavik opposite the town, called Vithey and Engey. Vithey belongs all to one young farmer, who has a pretty house and a big dairy, thirty cows, and lives there with his family and servants. There is a

Eider-ducks

curious little old church on Vithey, where there is an ancient custom of leaving the door always open to let the birds fly in and out. But Engey is the home of the eider-duck, and the two farmers who live on it pay their rent in the down from the birds' nests. In June the young are hatched, and the down is then taken from each nest, leaving enough for the young birds. It is very curious to walk along the grassy mounds ; each hollow between them contains a nest. The mother-ducks are wonderfully tame, and only move a little way off while one collects the spare soft down which lines the nest : this is only taken if the young are hatched. Before the collector of the down leaves the nest he must be careful to see that the poor little fledglings are safely tucked in. The mother-bird soon goes back to them and keeps them warm. When the down is collected it is spread out to dry in the sun and wind, and then put up in bags for sale.

I have now told you about the principal features of Iceland, but of course there is a

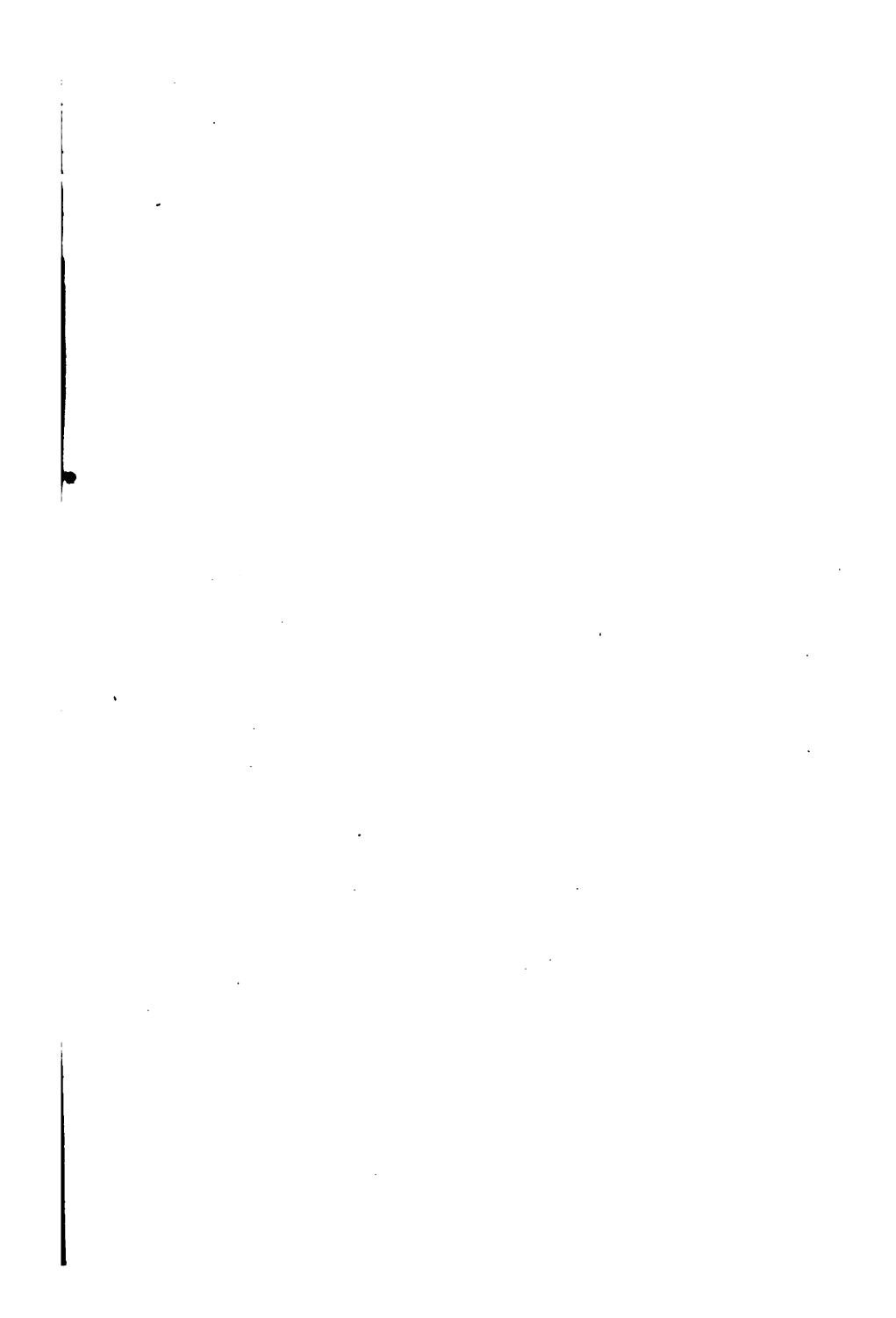
Iceland

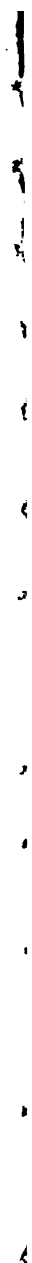
great deal more that might be said. I hope that what I have been able to describe may awaken your interest in this wonderful land, which perhaps some of you may one day go and explore for yourselves.

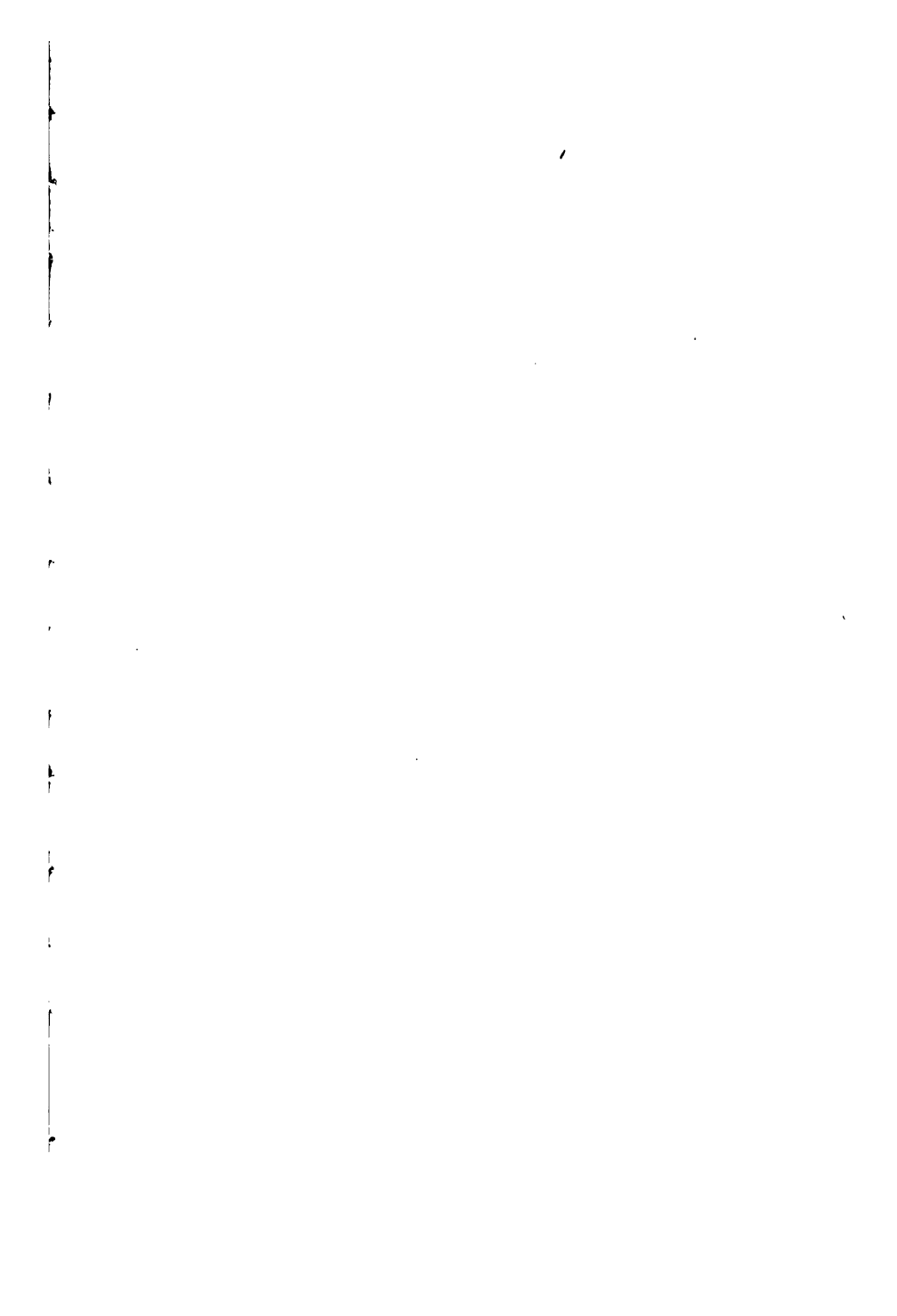
THE END

ban.

31







**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT**

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]